



2013 Update

Calgary Research Agenda



Calgary
Homeless
Foundation

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	3
Snapshot Status Report – 2010 Research Agenda.....	4
Advancing the Agenda – What We Have Learned	7
Calgary Homeless Foundation’s Contributions.....	8
Updating the Research Agenda to End Homelessness	10
Supporting Local Research	11
The Updated Research Agenda	12
Immediate Priorities	15
Homelessness Management information System (HMIS)	15
Priority Research Projects	15
Strengthen Calgary’s Homelessness Research Network	16
Knowledge Mobilization.....	16
Acknowledgments.....	17

Acknowledgement

Recognition is given to the important work of academic researchers, community-based organizations and government bodies. All had a common goal of gaining a clearer understanding of the issues, experiences and solutions needed to end homelessness in our communities.

Thanks are extended to Calgary’s community of people experiencing homelessness for their continued feedback, advice and expertise.

Special thanks to Burnet Duckworth & Palmer for generously supporting the 2012 Research Symposium.

Executive Summary

Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (10 Year Plan) was launched in January 2008 by Calgary's Committee to End Homelessness and the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) was chosen to lead its implementation. There were several key strategies in the original plan, including a strategy specific to data and research. In order to improve data and systems knowledge, the CHF in consultation with academic and community researchers, engaged in the first Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium to develop a research agenda in 2008.

The 10 Year Plan was assessed and updated in 2010 to reflect what was learned from research and interventions during the first years of implementation. In the updated plan, data and evidence-based knowledge were seen as critical to informing the advancement of the 10 Year Plan, to reform and improve mainstream systems, and to guide and measure progress. That year the second Homeless Research Symposium was held to assess CHF's progress towards identified research goals and to update the research agenda.

In 2012, the CHF continued consultation with community and local researchers through the third Homelessness Research Symposium. More than 120 local researchers, academics, service providers and government representatives were in attendance. Their input and feedback were instrumental in updating the research agenda and in aligning future research priorities with the goals and strategies of the updated 10 Year Plan.

Since 2008, collaborative efforts have built a strong and rigorous foundation to advance the implementation of the 10 Year Plan in an evidence-based manner and to enhance our community's understanding about homelessness and the interventions necessary to end it. The dissemination of this research has built awareness, strengthened networks, supported transparency in lessons learned, and deepened our efforts.

The original research priorities have remained consistent since 2008: The Ecology of Homelessness, Tailoring Interventions and System Coordination and capacity. This is important as it allows for significant momentum to be built around common priorities increasing our knowledge substantially in these areas.

Work to date shows:

- Significant progress has been made in the priority research areas of Ecology of Homelessness and Tailoring Interventions; particularly in the areas of priority subpopulations including Aboriginal peoples, youth, women and families, and those at-risk. The priority for expanding our knowledge in these areas is now to assess and evaluate effective program models and interventions for priority subpopulations
- More work needs to be done specific to the third research priority, system coordination and capacity
- There is a rich body of research emerging locally, nationally and internationally that advances our understandings and informs our decision making. Evidence-based decision making is now at the forefront of devising strategies and implementing interventions to strengthen accountability and transparency for the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the community and all levels of government
- Even though the priority directions that guided the original research agenda remain relevant, specific projects have been updated and new gaps in knowledge have emerged

- According to community feedback current and future research should prioritize our community's most vulnerable people including, chronically homeless, Aboriginal peoples, youth, women and families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.
- Continued collaboration and knowledge dissemination is key to building on the existing momentum and continuing efforts to end homelessness.

This document presents an update to the 2010 Research Agenda to summarize progress over the past two years, to reflect what has been learned, and to highlight changing and emerging priorities.

For a copy of the two previous Research Agendas visit the Calgary

Homelessness Research network, the Homeless Hub at: <http://homelesshub.net/network/chf>

Background

The vision of the 10 Year Plan is that by January 2018 all people facing homelessness in Calgary will have access to safe, decent and affordable housing as well as the resources and supports necessary to sustain that housing within a week of becoming homeless.

Four key strategies underlie Calgary's updated 10 Year Plan (2012): (1) Developing a homeless-serving system that ensures Calgarians at-risk of or experiencing homelessness have the support they need to achieve and maintain housing stability; (2) Ensure adequate affordable and supportive housing; (3) Improve data and systems knowledge; and (4) Reinforce non-profit organizations serving Calgarians at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Research is recognized as its own strategy, but it is also a critical and core component across strategies. An evidence-based understanding of the issues and best practices is necessary to effectively establish and strengthen our service and policy responses. Moving the research into action and supporting the translation of knowledge and best practice into our service delivery models is a primary goal of Calgary's Research Agenda.

Mobilizing Calgary's research community around a shared agenda in support of the 10 Year Plan is fundamental to its success. Calgary's Homelessness Research Network is a critical vehicle for enhancing our capacity to connect, coordinate and collaborate around this effort and to ensure homelessness research across Canada covers a broad range of methodologies and multidisciplinary approaches. As well, launching the research network in partnership with the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) has been instrumental in the development of the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium and links to other national and international researchers and networks.

The CHRN was created to provide an essential and effective vehicle for bringing researchers together across sectors and to unite and strengthen efforts around the implementation of the Research Agenda. In collaboration with CHRN, Calgary's research network was officially launched during the Canadian Homelessness Conference in February of 2009. This network represents the first local online research network to be launched under the umbrella of the national homelessness research clearing house, The HomelessHub.ca.

In addition, the CHF will prioritize knowledge mobilization events in the community to actively engage and collaborate with community partners and front line service providers to ensure research and evidence informed practice. Events will showcase promising practice models and HMIS data to improve local knowledge of Calgary's homeless population and effective methods of intervention.

Research has become an instrumental component of Calgary's system of care to ensure evidence-based decision making and appropriate interventions grounded in best practice are implemented in the community to end homelessness.

Collaboration, knowledge exchange, public engagement, research rigor and capacity building are core principles emphasized in the Research Agenda. Calgary's Research Network provides a tool to build capacity across all of these areas.

Snapshot Status Report – 2010 Research Agenda

In response to the 2010 research agenda, the CHF engaged in a number of research and knowledge mobilization projects, formed partnerships with researchers in Calgary, across Canada and internationally, and generated efforts to establish funding in support of research addressing the three priority research directions: The ecology of homelessness; tailoring interventions; and system coordination and capacity.

As a result of these efforts, the CHF has been able to follow through on many of the goals and strategies identified in 2009-2010. The list below highlights progress against research priorities.

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Critical Research Areas	Status Report
<p>1. Ecology of Homelessness (or population enumeration and composition)</p>	<p>a. Continue the implementation of a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) to capture real-time data on numbers of homeless persons, basic demographics, services accessed, outcomes and system capacity. Support the use and interpretation of data longitudinally across the Calgary community of care.</p>	Ongoing
	<p>b. Assess the existing evidence regarding the circumstances that lead to patterns of youth, women, and family homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness.</p>	Completed/Ongoing
	<p>c. Determine methods of assessing data about hidden homelessness over time, to monitor overall trends of and associative factors contributing to it.</p>	Ongoing
	<p>d. Develop an enhanced understanding of Aboriginal people's experience of homelessness and its public policy implications.</p>	Ongoing
	<p>e. Conduct a point-in time count of rough sleepers to assess need and adequate response.</p>	Completed/Ongoing
	<p>f. Examine labour dynamics in homeless populations; analyze the sub-population that is employed or has a history of employment in informal/low income work.</p>	Completed

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Critical Research Areas	Status Report
<p>2. Tailoring Interventions (or implementing best results through the evaluation loop)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Based on a review of the existing evidence, identify services, programs, and policy responses for different priority sub-groups of the homeless population: chronic and episodically homeless, women, Aboriginal, families, and youth using HMIS. b. Implement a consistent framework for evaluation based on best practices for interventions over time leveraging HMIS. c. Assess the impact of social supports such as income assistance, short-term rental assistance and prevention services on homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships longitudinally. d. Explore the relationship of mainstream social service systems, including child intervention services, corrections and mental health in pathways in/out of homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships, and of sustaining this evaluation, longitudinally. e. Identify means of determining best housing interventions for priority subpopulations and means of evaluating these over time. f. Assess the role of transitional housing and emergency shelters to determine best impact in ending homelessness. g. Assess the cost effectiveness of Housing First interventions. 	<p>Completed/Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed/Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>3. System Coordination and Capacity (or system barriers and facilitators)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify capacity issues facing agencies serving the homeless, actions needed to shift towards ending homelessness, and determine sustained means of evaluating these issues. b. Assess flows through current non-market housing stock, current levels of coordination among homeless serving agencies, and how these processes can be evaluated longitudinally. c. Identify regulatory mechanisms to increase and maintain the supply of affordable housing. d. Establish “promising practices” for program and systems evaluation in ending homelessness program types and determine means of evaluating these practices, and of sustaining this evaluation over time. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Critical Research Areas	Status Report
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Enhance knowledge transfer efforts by supporting the development and implementation of sector-based research agendas and feedback loops in non-profit and public sectors. f. Identify standards of care across program types in Calgary's community of care including: outreach, shelters, transitional and permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, and rapid rehousing and prevention services. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed/Ongoing</p>

Advancing the Agenda – What We Have Learned

Since 2010, a number of important research projects have been completed in Calgary and across Canada. The CHF led, partnered and supported several of these. National, often pan-Canadian, projects and partnerships led to a breadth of current information about the state of homelessness in Canada. This work aligns with the identified key priorities in Calgary's Research Agenda and 10 Year Plan.

Specifically, these projects have led to:

- Clarity of demographics (age, gender, cultural background, history of homelessness) through HMIS data and point-in-time counts.
- The social and economic costs of homelessness.
- Clarity of intervention and support needs for priority sub-populations including Aboriginal people, youth, rough sleepers and families.
- Patterns of homelessness (chronic, episodic and transitional) and clarity in language and definitions to support alignment through targeting, eligibility and service delivery.
- Risks and protective factors (individual and systemic); development of common assessment frameworks for delivering prevention and rapid re-housing services; and development of Risk and Assets for Homeless Prevention (HART) tool.
- System responses tailored to discharge planning processes.
- Specific strategic plan to address Aboriginal homelessness.
- Best practices for interventions.
- Health and housing needs of homeless and vulnerably housed people.
- Enhanced collaboration and knowledge mobilization through pan provincial and national research projects.

Calgary Homeless Foundation's Contributions

Since 2010, the CHF has been involved in collaborations across three main fronts.

1. Addressing research priorities

- Gathering and analyzing data through the HMIS, with a focus on specified sub-populations, length of homelessness and needs to prioritize for intervention.
- Identification of effective models of housing and support for particular sub populations including Aboriginal people, youth, families, and our most acute and chronically homeless to strengthen models in Calgary's system of care promoting residential stability and reducing incidences of housing recidivism.
- Understanding the effectiveness of a systems approach to homelessness through the implementation and evaluation of Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA).
- Prevalence and impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) among chronically and episodically homeless.
- Assessing sector capacity within our community, particularly rates of burn out and vicarious trauma.
- Homelessness and human rights.
- Feasibility and implications of harm reduction housing and policies.
- Assessing fidelity of Housing First programs within the system of care.
- Enhancing local research capacity across the province with the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium.

2. Creating opportunities for research transfer and knowledge mobilization

- Developing partnerships with the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy, CHRN, Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research, and REACH3 on provincial and national research projects on homelessness and forming international links with European, Australian, and U.S. partners.
- Developing and maintaining an online Calgary Homelessness Research Network, and contributing to the Homeless Hub.
- Producing policy submissions to the federal and provincial governments specific to reducing system barriers and increasing housing stock.
- Sharing information through conference presentations and keynote addresses, hosting two research symposiums and events to highlight current local, national and international research.
- Developing a CHF knowledge mobilization strategy to ensure data gathered through research is strategically used to inform the evolution of the 10 Year Plan.

3. Promoting a common research agenda

- Participating in provincial efforts to mobilize research to end homelessness through the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium, and Canadian Homelessness Research Network
- Facilitating local research transfer and agenda-setting through conferences, research symposiums and community events focused on how to translate research into practice and use evidence to inform decision making.

- Partnering on two national research projects.
- Collaborating with the community to support sector-based research priorities.

For a more comprehensive description of the research projects across Calgary, including the work of the CHF and partners in the public, non-profit and academic sectors, please visit the Calgary Homeless Hub website at: <http://homelesshub.net/network/chf>

Updating the Research Agenda to End Homelessness

Several themes emerged as knowledge-gaps requiring additional research. In addition, a number of key recommendations for action were captured from group deliberations at the 2012 research symposium:

Key themes to explore:

- means of reducing service barriers,
- impacts of public policy on homelessness,
- improving system collaborations,
- effective homelessness prevention, and
- rigorous and coordinated evaluation efforts.

Specific research projects:

4. Determine redundancies and gaps in programming, and facilitate collaboration within and across agencies and services.
5. Determine best practices based on evidence and evaluation, using a broader definition of research, a wide range of methodologies, and community-based approaches involving clients, service providers and the public.
6. Determine best practices related to knowledge transfer and the dissemination of information for maximum advocacy and uptake.
7. Address the need for more client-centered services, and more flexibility within these services.
8. Continue to implement the HMIS to provide a central database related to homelessness in Calgary, and to capture and retrieve data for both research and intervention purposes.
9. Enhance the Research Network in support of the Research Agenda. To strengthen and deepen the Network's capacity, next steps should focus on relevancy, increased participation, and opportunities to engage more broadly and more interactively.
10. Specifically include research on the unique pathways, needs and interventions for priority subpopulations, notably, Aboriginal people, women, families, and youth. Support for community research projects should be led by agencies and include the Community Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness (CACHH).
11. Enhance collaboration with other local, national and international research groups and networks. For example, The University of Calgary, The City of Calgary, the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium, CHRN, Reach3, the National Housing Research Committee, The National Alliance to End Homelessness, European Observatory on Homelessness and Heriot-Watt University.
12. Involve persons with lived experience of homelessness in the research process, from concept to publication.
13. Focus research on best practices for homelessness prevention, including discharge processes from health and correctional facilities.

14. Strategically and collaboratively mobilize evidence-based research findings into program, policy and system changes.

Supporting Local Research

The CHF acknowledges the variety of academic and community based research happening locally. In addition, CHF acknowledges the development and implementation of community-based, collaborative research agendas in the areas of Aboriginal homelessness, women and family homelessness and youth homelessness. CHF is committed to working in partnership with these groups for the purposes of shared data, knowledge dissemination and policy and practice advancements. For examples of community-based research agendas, visit the Homeless Hub website at: <http://homelesshub.net/network/chf>

The Updated Research Agenda

The Priority Research Directions underlying the original Three Year Research Agenda are acknowledged as still relevant. To supplement the ongoing research efforts originally identified in the Research Agenda, a number of key recommendations for action and next steps are captured below. The specific role that CHF plays in each of the actions will vary depending on the work of other researchers but priority will be given to collaboration, dissemination and evidence-based policy/practice advancements.

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Recommendations for Action	10 Year Plan Implementation Strategy
<p>1. Ecology of Homelessness (or population enumeration and composition)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to refine the HMIS, utilizing data to inform research projects. b. Examine recidivism in Housing First to identify population characteristics of those classified as “hard to house” and appropriate sustainable housing interventions. c. Develop methods to determine hidden homeless population and raise public awareness about homelessness. d. Create operational definitions around Housing First, recidivism, length of stay, etc. e. Engage people with lived experience to help in identifying system gaps and support the hiring of people with lived experience in research projects. f. Participate in province wide Point-in-Time Counts towards comparative analysis. g. Develop an enhanced understanding of the population characteristics and needs of: seniors, complex families, persons with FASD, youth aged 12-24. 	<p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p>

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Recommendations for Action	10 Year Plan Implementation Strategy
<p>2. Tailoring Interventions (or implementing best results through the evaluation loop)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Investigate and support the housing needs of clients with FASD. b. Identify best housing interventions for priority subpopulations and means of evaluating these over time with particular attention on housing recidivism and housing models (scattered site vs. place based). c. Explore intervention options for vulnerable or marginalized populations that fall outside of eligibility criteria for available programming. d. Explore best practices for culturally appropriate and relevant services and housing for the Aboriginal homeless population. e. Investigate the issues related to risk management that are affecting the provision of services. f. Develop a standardized evaluation protocol with defined outcomes specific to targeted populations of interest for different programs and approaches. g. Identify rates of victimization among the homeless and barriers to reporting criminal incidences/victimizations to agencies and law enforcement. 	<p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing Strategy 2: Housing Strategy1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention & Rehousing</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p>
<p>3. System Coordination and Capacity (or system barriers and facilitators)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and synthesize best practices to impact program design, standards and performance measurement. b. Develop a Homeless Charter of Rights to ensure clients have full access to service, housing and employment without discrimination. c. Assess impact of migration on homeless serving agencies and ability to end homelessness. d. Effectively mobilize knowledge gained through research amongst the public/media in order to reduce stigma, shift public opinion, maximize impact and effect policy change. 	<p>Strategy 3: Data & Research Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector</p> <p>Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 3: Data & Research Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector</p>

3 Year Priority Research Directions	Recommendations for Action	10 Year Plan Implementation Strategy
	e. Enhance knowledge translation through community forums to promote collaboration and networking amongst frontline staff to determine their research needs.	Strategy 3: Data & Research Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector
	f. Refine, improve and expand Calgary's research network and Homeless Hub site in order to facilitate the sharing of information.	Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector
	g. Examine the psychosocial needs of frontline staff to determine system barriers and facilitators.	Strategy 3: Data & Research Strategy 4: Non-Profit Sector

Additional recommendations were highlighted in the following areas:

1. Knowledge sharing and mobilization to translate research into practice, maximize impact and effect policy change.
2. Develop promising practices for prevention and early intervention to stop the flow of people entering homelessness.
3. Evaluation of housing models and applicability/effectiveness for specified populations including harm reduction housing, high system users, and Aboriginal people.
4. Investigate issues related to risk management for agencies and impact on service delivery.

Immediate Priorities

An understanding of the context of homelessness, including trajectories and the unique needs of sub populations is critical to effectively deliver a system of care capable of ending homelessness. Research is critical for improving our systems knowledge and ensuring strategic and evidence-based decision making to ensure tailored interventions are implemented effectively that meet the needs of clients and promote residential stability. Data and evidence-based knowledge are essential to informing and advancing the 10 Year Plan, to effectively establish and strengthen our service and policy responses, to reform and improve mainstream systems, and to guide and measure progress. Research provides an outcome-based tool, creating innovative opportunities to advance and produce high-quality services within a client-centred system of care.

Although the above strategies are prioritized for the next three years, immediate priority will be given in the following areas:

Homelessness Management information System (HMIS)

The HMIS system has been implemented in over 90 programs. Important data specific to length of stay in shelter, recidivism, and trends and patterns in homelessness is emerging. In addition, data from our housing programs is articulating client success rates, reasons for client discharge, systems interactions and migration habits. Implementation of this database will inform decision making to reduce systems barriers, improve service interventions and evaluation, as well as understand the needs of Calgary's homeless community. By improving the quality and availability of information, the HMIS will make access to, and coordination of, services to those at-risk of or experiencing homelessness easier and more effective.

Real-time and longitudinal data from HMIS can be interpreted and used strategically. Homeless serving agencies are now able to analyze, report, and respond to this data while maintaining client privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, community-based and academic researchers can access the data for research purposes to strengthen local knowledge of Calgary's homeless community, while developing effective interventions to end homelessness.

Priority Research Projects

- Identify and synthesize best practices to impact program design, standards and performance management leveraging HMIS data and program evaluations
- Investigate the housing and support needs of individuals with FASD and developmental disabilities.
- Identify housing interventions for priority sub populations, including Aboriginals, youth, families, and means of evaluating these over time.
- Develop evaluation protocol with defined outcomes specific to target populations for different program models and service delivery approaches.
- Determine scope of hidden homeless, and at-risk population in Calgary.
- Assess rates of recidivism in Housing First programs and identify population characteristics for individuals classified as "hard to house".

- Determine effectiveness of permanent supportive housing for individuals with co-morbidity and assess feasibility of harm reduction housing.
- Develop a Homeless Charter of Rights to ensure individuals have full access to services, housing and employment without discrimination based on homelessness status and increase public awareness.
- Develop promising practice with standardized assessment and screening for prevention and rapid rehousing for homeless and at-risk families.

Strengthen Calgary's Homelessness Research Network

Strategies to enhance the development of Calgary's research network and strengthen its capacity as a vehicle for generating research, exchanging and translating knowledge, promoting collaboration, and fostering innovation and research excellence are critical to reducing redundancies and building on best practice.

Knowledge Mobilization

Data and evidence-based knowledge gathered through research is strategically used to inform the evolution of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, reform mainstream systems, improve the homeless-serving system, and guide and measure progress of homeless-serving agencies working on the plan. In particular, knowledge generated through research is used to develop best practices and advocate priority policy and programmatic changes to address the root causes of homelessness. This is achieved through collaborative partnerships with members of the community including the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy and the Faculties of Social Work and Medicine, the Community Action Committee, the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium, Reach3, CHRN, and the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness. Through these relationships, our aim is to develop research-based recommendations that are situated within the social context of Calgary to improve policy as well as develop and standardize best practices in the areas of income supports, funding of homeless-serving systems, affordable housing, and access to services and processes for discharging from public systems.

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Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium	Highbanks Society
Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness	Hindsight Group
Alberta Seniors and Community Supports	Homeward Trust
Aspen Family and Community Services	HRJ Consulting Ltd.
Bethany Care Centre	Inn From the Cold
Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary	JYC Creative Solutions Inc
Calgary Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness	Living Homeless: Our Write to Speak
Calgary Alpha House Society	Mount Royal University
Calgary Alternative Support Services	The Mustard Seed
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society	Pathways to Housing
Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre	Salvation Army
Calgary Homeless Foundation	Safeworks Calgary
Calgary John Howard Society	Servants Anonymous
Calgary Legal Guidance	Service Canada
Calgary Police Service	Schizophrenia Society of Alberta
Calgary Urban Project Society	Simon House Recovery Centre
Canadian Homelessness Research Network	The Alex Community Health Centre
Canadian Mental Health Association	Trinity Place Foundation of Alberta
Canadian Red Cross	United Way of Calgary & Area
Caresce Inc.	University of Alberta
Centre of Addictions Research BC	University of Calgary
Centre for Northern Families	University of Lethbridge
City of Calgary	University of Melbourne
City of Red Deer	University of Victoria
Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	York University
Eva's Initiatives	Youth Recovery Coalition
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